

Second Avenue, North, Commercial District  
NE side of Second Avenue, North, between  
Broadway and Church Street  
Nashville  
Davidson County  
Tennessee

HABS No. TN-20

HABS,  
TENN,  
19-NASH,  
14 -

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Architectural and Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SECOND AVENUE, NORTH, COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

HABS No. TN-20

Location: Northeast side Second Avenue, North, between Broadway and Church Street, Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee.

Present Owners: Various.

Present Uses: Wholesale warehouses, retail outlets, and offices.

Significance: Initially known as Market Street, Second Avenue from Broadway to the Public Square was probably the most important business street in Nashville in the last half of the nineteenth century. The block of Second Avenue between Church Street and Broadway, the only portion to survive substantially intact, contains buildings which exemplify the development of commercial architecture in the late nineteenth century.

PART I. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

## A. History

The block of Second Avenue between Church Street and Broadway backs onto First Avenue, originally Front Street. The city wharf, at Broadway and First, was a transportation center during much of the nineteenth century when most of the city's freight was carried by boat down the Cumberland River. Easy access to these facilities explains in great part the location of the wholesale district just a block away from the river. In the early 1900s, with a network of railroads across the state, water transportation practically ceased, but in the '30s barge and tugboat lines renewed activity on the waterfront.

While few hard facts concerning the precise evolution of this block could be determined, the general development can be gleaned from maps and contemporary accounts. The map "Nashville in 1854" indicates a solid row of buildings along the blocks of Market Street (Second Avenue) between Broad and Public Square, rendered as peripheral structures around the edges of the blocks, with the center portions presumably open and devoid of building.

This pattern appears to have changed following the Civil War. The Federal Writer's Project, Tennessee: A Guide to the State (New York, 1939), p. 185, provides an insight into the developments which account substantially for the row of warehouses along Market Street (or Second Avenue) which survives to the present day. It observes, in its essay on Nashville, the following development:

Not until 1875-76, when a great business boom began, did Nashville begin to regain lost ground. By the later part of 1876 railway traffic had greatly increased, and the Cumberland River again became an important waterway. Packet and freight lines operated from the wharf at the foot of Broad Street, and blocks of warehouses were built.

Charles E. Roberts suggests, however, that this construction was actually begun in 1869. He speaks of the great improvements in Nashville being manifested in the new styles of architecture "adopted in our buildings." This applies not only to residences, for he observes:

A most noticeable revolution, too, is going on among our business houses, the squatty two and three-story bricks, in which our merchants formerly transacted business, and where they became successful and wealthy, are rapidly disappearing for the taller three, four and five story houses, elaborately ornamented and beautified, and rich and costly in their designs. Wood fronts, too, are giving place to brick, stone, or iron, and the severest simplicity superceded by elegance, lightness and beauty. More attention is being paid, too, to the purposes for which it is intended -- the construction and style being made to conform, so far as may be, to the character of the business for which it is intended. This revolution is mainly due to the presence, in our midst, of scientific and skillful architects and builders, who never fail to make a presentable job whenever room or any advantage in location is given them (Nashville and her trade for 1870 (Nashville, 1870), p. 50).

Fortunately, Roberts did specify one block of buildings on the east side of Market Street, erected in 1869, which still stands there today -- "the Spring Brook Block (erected) at (a cost of) \$140,000" at 154-162 Second Avenue, North. Thus, we know that the present general pattern of warehouse construction began at least in 1869 with the Spring Brook Block. According to an advertisement in Roberts' book (p. 62), among the first occupants of the Spring Brook Buildings was McCrea & Co., successors to Hugh McCrea & Co. The ad states that the firm is "Cotton & tobacco factors and commission merchants," as well as "agents for the sale of Eagle Mills Standard Cotton Yarns and Young's Copper Distilled Whiskey."

This pattern of warehouse rows was already clearly established by 1889 and thus delineated by C. M. Hopkins in his 1889 Atlas. Here the Spring Brook Buildings (or Block) is identified simply as "Fotte." Two other complexes are here identified which are known to have survived to the present day. These are the "Rhea Building" and the "Watkins Block." Little is know about them, except that a stone marker on the former has the inscription "Rhea Building - 1887."

B. Construction

The nineteenth-century buildings typically are of brick masonry construction. The interior is timber construction, with wooden built-up trusses to frame openings for skylights; interior posts tend to be a combination of iron and wood. Due to the fact that these warehouses often provided storage space, many were unencumbered with interior bearing walls.

In plan, the buildings average between 30 and 50 feet in width. All except the corner buildings run the full width of the block, from building line to building line. The fronts face Second Avenue; the rears, on First Avenue. The rear facades apparently were those through which freight and merchandise was loaded, no doubt often directly from the wharf on the Cumberland River just across the street. The facades, or storefronts, facing Second Avenue, on the whole employed cast-iron fronts for the ground floor only. These cast-iron fronts usually were crowned by a cornice scaled to one story. The treatment of the facade from the second through the third, fourth, or fifth story, depending on the height of the building, was either plain wall surface or a surface articulated by pilasters. Richly treated window frames were customary as were elaborate cornices surmounting the facade and scaled for the entire building.

C. The Buildings

The building at 184 Second Avenue, North, is a three-story, six-bay brick building, whose ground floor has been remodeled by covering the cornice. The building appears to have been built at the turn of the twentieth century. The building at 180 Second Avenue, North, is a three-story modest warehouse probably dating from the 1890s. To the south at 178 Second Avenue, North, is an early twentieth-century structure. An engraving in Cornman's Nashville..., p. 13, dating from the 1890s, does not indicate any of these three buildings.

At 174 and 176 Second Avenue, North, is a pair of four-story four-bay buildings probably dating from the 1870s. These appear on Cornman's 1890s engraving, but they are rendered as identical. In reality, the northern building has round-arched windows on the second and third floors and segmentally arched windows on the fourth floor. The southern building's windows are trabeated. The cornices on both buildings are indetical and correspond to those rendered in the engraving. The cast-iron storefronts on both buildings remain surprisingly intact.

According to the inscription on the building, the Rhea Building at 164-166 Second Avenue, North, was erected in 1887. Its presence is noted on the 1889 Hopkins map.

The five buildings at 154-162 Second Avenue, North, are the Spring Brook Buildings, as noted on the cornice. Roberts informs us that this block was erected in 1869 at a cost of \$140,000, making these the earliest buildings in this commercial district. Three stories in height, these buildings have round-arched windows with cast-iron hoodmolds. The cast-iron storefronts are largely intact, although their cornices have been covered. The facade is crowned by a simple bracketed cornice.

The block of buildings at 152 Second Avenue, North, is a tripartite composition probably dating from the 1870s or '80s. The pairing of the windows, their elongation, and the paired brackets in the cornice comprise a slightly more sophisticated design than the Spring Brook Buildings next door. This block too retains vestiges of its cast-iron storefront.

A stone in the facade of the building at 144-146 Second Avenue, North, reads "Pilcher." Hopkins' 1889 map, as well as Watkins' 1908 map, identify this lot as belonging to M. B. Pilcher, and the cornice and cast-iron storefront point to a nineteenth-century erection date. The modernistic design of the facade, however, particularly the large window openings, seem to date from the 1920s or '30s, perhaps suggesting extensive remodeling at that time.

Little is known of the building at 142 Second Avenue, North. Five stories in height, with double windows paired in each half of the facade, it appears to date from the late nineteenth century.

The building at 138-140 Second Avenue, North, a four-story two-part storefront, would appear to be transitional between the nineteenth and the twentieth century styles in Nashville's commercial architecture. The severity of its lines, the large window openings, here composed by grouping three tall double-hung windows into a single opening, and the simplification of the crowning cornice, all speak of general influences of the Chicago School of commercial architecture which appear to have come to Nashville somewhere at the turn of the century.

In contrast, the handsome three-story building on the south, 132 Second Avenue, North, with its attenuated proportions, is indicative of comparable buildings in Nashville dating from the early 1880s. The brick hoodmolds over the segmentally arched windows, together with the stone bosses on which they rest, are especially noteworthy.

The buildings at 128 and 120-124 Second Avenue, North, represent uninspired attempts in the 1920s to erect modernistic buildings with a modicum of compatibility with their striking nineteenth-century neighbors. The building at 128 has a stone inscribed "Hooper, 1924."

Set in the middle of these modernistic variants is an exquisite three-story structure which exemplified Victorian commercial architecture in Nashville. The pediment above the cornice has the date "1879." The verticality of the composition is broken by horizontal bands between the stories, and the rich surface treatment is balanced by the heavy cornice.

The buildings at 108-114 Second Avenue, North, comprise the "Watkins Block," whose inscription provides the date, "1875." This four-building, three-story block combines the simplicity of the Spring Brook Buildings at 154-162 with some sophistication, such as the ornamental brickwork and paired brackets in the cornice, of the structure at 152.

The lots just south of the Watkins Block are vacant. At the corner of Broadway, numbered 100 Second Avenue, North, is a small three-story building which features an octagonal turret on the corner. Once the "Silver Dollar" saloon, the building was probably built in the 1890s.

## PART II. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

### 1. Early Views:

A file of photographs and views of Second Avenue is held in the Photographic File, Library Division, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

An excellent engraving of Second Avenue by the Moss Engraving Co., entitled "Market Street - from Church, south," is published in John Cornman, ed., Nashville: An Illustrated Review of Its Progress and Importance. (Nashville? n.d.), p. 13.

A drawing of "Market Street, Looking North Toward Cherry [sic, Public Square]," is published in Ira P. Jones, The City of Nashville (Nashville, 1890), n.p.n.

A photograph of the rear of the warehouse row, facing Front Street, with a view of the wharf on the Cumberland River, entitled "Front Street, Looking North from Broad," is published in William Waller, ed., Nashville in the 1890's (Nashville, 1970), following p. 172.

### 2. Maps

Smith Criddle, "Map of the City of Nashville." Planned and published by J. P. Ayres. Surveyed by Smith Criddle, Cincinnati. Engraved by Doolittle & Munson, 1831.

W. F. Foster, "Map of the City of Nashville and Vicinity." Compiled from official records and the latest surveys. [n.p.] Tavel, Eastman & Havell, 1878.

C.M. Hopkins, Atlas of the City of Nashville, Tennessee. Compiled from official records, private plans, and actual surveys. Philadelphia, 1889.

"Nashville in 1854." n.p.d. Item 409 in the Tennessee Historical Society file at the Tennessee State Library and Archives.

Real Estate Atlas of Davidson County, Tennessee: Detail Tax Map Volume. 4th ed. Miami: Real Estate Directories, Inc., 1970.

Real Estate Atlas of Davidson County, Tennessee: Aerial-Tax Map Volume. Miami: Real Estate Directories, Inc. 1970.

Sanborn Map Co., Insurance Maps of Nashville, Tennessee, vol. 1 (New York, 1914), plate 4.

G. M. Watkins, Maps of the City of Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee. (Philadelphia, 1908), Plate 2.

H. Wellge & Co., "Nashville, Tennessee, in the 1880's," Milwaukee, 1888.

### PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the National Park Service in cooperation with the Tennessee Historical Commission and the Historic Sites Federation of Tennessee. Structures were measured and drawn in July, 1970, under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief of HABS, and Roy C. Pledger, project supervisor (Texas A & M University), Anatole Senkevitch, Jr., historian (University of Virginia), by student architects Donald W. Graham and William H. Edwards (University of Illinois), and Donna G. Woodrum and Robert J. Dunnay (Virginia Polytechnic Institute), at the Historic American Buildings Survey field office, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee. The photographers was Jack E. Boucher of the HABS staff. The written data were edited by Alison K. Hoagland of the HABS staff in June, 1981.

PART III. SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

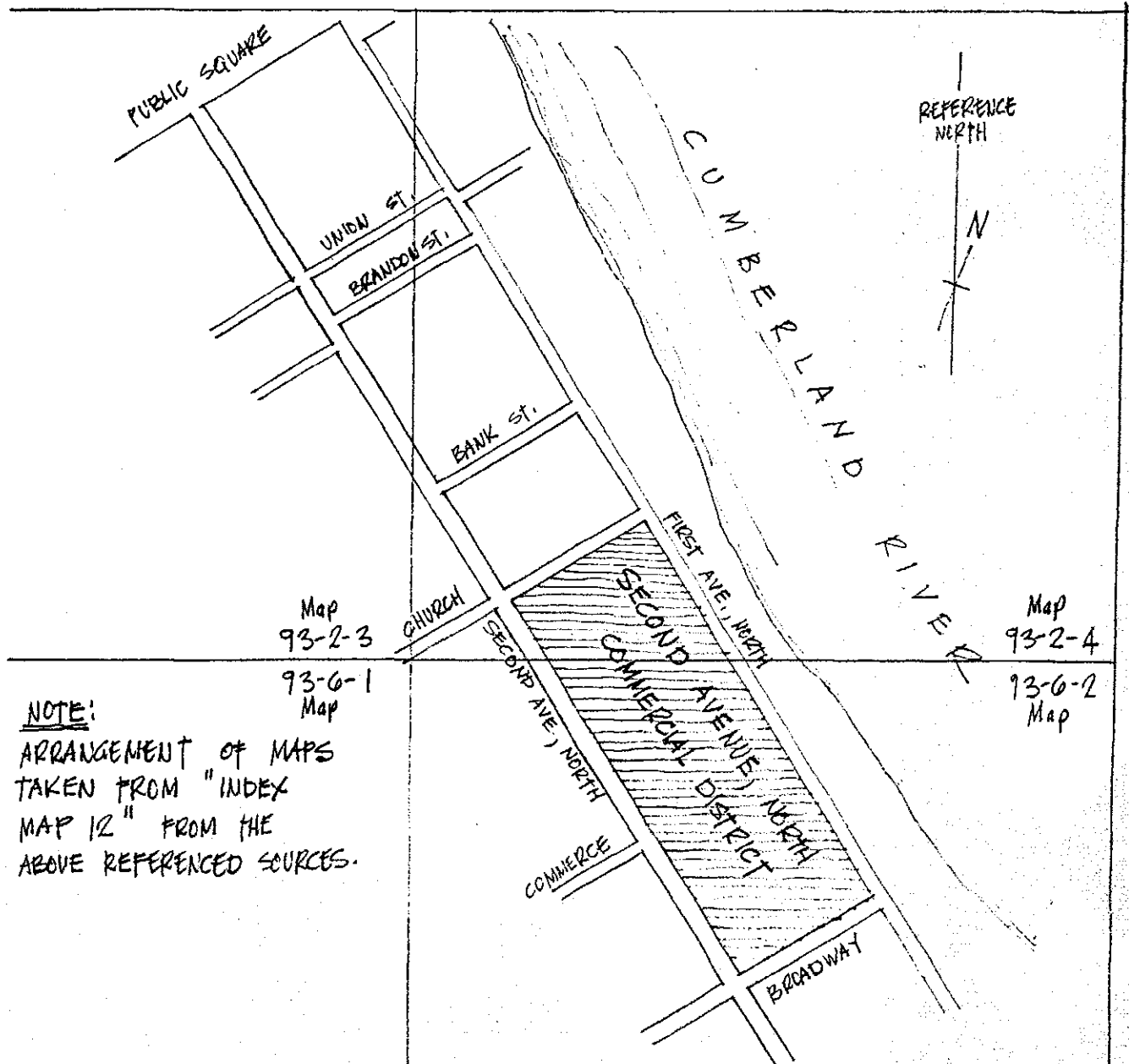
PROPERTY MAP OF SECOND AVENUE, NORTH, COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

The map which follows has been taken from the following work:

Real Estate Atlas of Davidson County, Tennessee.  
Detail Tax Map Volume. 4th ed. Miami: Real Estate Directories, Inc., 1970. (The maps contained in this volume were taken from, and duplicate in every way, the "Property Maps and Records" on file at the Property Mapping Section, Metro Courthouse, Nashville, Tennessee.

Key to the Map (reproduced below):

To produce a complete map of the Second Avenue, North, Commercial District, four property maps for Davidson County, Tennessee (noted above), were pieced together. These are maps 93-2-3, 93-2-4, 93-6-1, and 93-6-2. Each lot is numbered and the number encircled. This number corresponds to the lot number on the preceding property ownership lists, following the map numbers.



NOTE:  
ARRANGEMENT OF MAPS  
TAKEN FROM "INDEX  
MAP 12" FROM THE  
ABOVE REFERENCED SOURCES.